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INTERROGATION OF KIRFEL ON FAR EASTERN SYSTEMS

Attached is a report on the interrogation of Harald Willibald KIRFEL of Amt VI of RSHA carried out at Camp O20 about October, 1945. It is the result of some general questions asked by TICOM and deals mainly with Japanese and Manchurian systems.

TICOM

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DECLASSIFIED(a) East Asiatic Coding Systems

KIRFEL said that in November, 1944, not long after he had taken up his duties with Abt. VI C 4, he was brought by one of his agents a number of coded messages from the Manchurian Legation. He immediately approached the code section of OKW and asked that decodes might be made from the messages which he produced. He was informed, however, by HUETTENHEIM ((sic)), head of the cryptographic department of OKW/Chi, and his assistant ADLER, that this was not possible, as the section was no further advanced with the breaking of East Asiatic codes than they had been at the beginning of the war. They also explained that up to then they had had little material on which to work, as the Post Office had not supplied them with copies of the messages handed in by the Far Eastern diplomatic missions, giving as an excuse that the quantity was too great. KIRFEL estimates in fact that the Japanese Embassy sent 4 to 5 and the Manchurian Legation 3 messages daily, each message covering one side of a closely written form as supplied by the German Post Office for the purpose.

Some of the messages from the Manchurian Legation were not encoded but written in Japanese latin script (Romaaji) and these KIRFEL was able to translate although with some difficulty, since they were exaggeratedly abbreviated. They held little of interest, however, as they were mainly extracts from Swiss, German and other newspapers. The percentage in Romaaji was about one third of the total number.

The messages entrusted to the German Post Office to be sent by W/T were mostly relayed to their destination. In the case of the Manchurian Legation they were sent via Berlin, Hsinking and received via Hsengkeng, Madrid, Berlin. Those of the Japanese Embassy went from Berlin via Madrid or alternatively Stockholm, or Stockholm, Moscow to Tokyo and the return routes used from Tokyo were the same.

OKW/Chi further informed KIRFEL that, in their opinion, the series of numbers of which the coded messages were composed were in all probability a code as opposed to a cypher.

It was realised by KIRFEL that unless the system used in these messages was broken, Abt. VI C 4 would be working under a great disadvantage and he gave instructions to his agents to obtain any information that they could discover, explaining at the same time the possible existence of a code book.

Shortly after this, KASAI, who was in charge of the coding section of the Manchurian Legation and was notoriously unstable, failed to lock away one of the books with which he had been working. This book was brought to KIRFEL, who had a photostat copy made and handed to OKW/Chi. With this code-book in their possession, HUETTENHEIM and ADLER then attempted to decode the messages, by then six in number, given to them by KIRFEL. They soon found, however, that they could arrive at no result and, although the number of messages obtained rose to forty, all their attempts met with failure.

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In the meantime, another agent also managed to obtain some coded messages, this time from the Japanese Embassy. On examination, it was found that these messages, unlike the Manchurian, were in some form of alphabetical code or cypher which HUETTENHEIM and ADLER again failed to break. They suggested, however, that the alphabetical code had a numerical base and was recyphered, the basic code being probably the one that had been stolen from the Manchurian Legation. In support of this theory, which appeared to have but slight foundation, it was pointed out that a few days after the discovery of the loss of the code-book, a special courier arrived from the Japanese Legation with a copy of the code-book to replace the one which had been lost. It was further put forward by the indefatigable pair that the recyphering was carried out with the aid of a machine and, once again, KIRFEL wasted no time in instructing his agents to make enquiries.

Although a close watch was kept by KIRFEL's agents, no trace could at first be found of the existence of a cyphering machine in any of the Japanese or Manchurian offices. But, in January 1945, one of them reported having seen a cyphering machine but said that it had only remained one day in the Manchurian Legation, had not been used and on the same evening had been taken to the private residence of the Manchurian Counsellor of the Legation, EHARA, a Japanese.

(b) Basic Codebook taken from the Manchurian Legation

This book, which was written in Japanese and published by the "Head of the Japanese Military Education and Training Establishment" (Kyoikosokan), was divided into three parts: introduction with instructions for use, code and decode. It contained about 300 pages. This was the only codebook secured from the Japanese. The coding sections were composed of a series of groups of four figures running from 0000 to 8999. Each four-figure group represented a Japanese character or a series of characters representing a meaning or a grammatical ending.

Example:-

大日本

0034

The Japanese

内務省

1785

Ministry of the Interior

書

6754

来した

0035

informs

The series of numbers having been obtained with the aid of the codebook, it was necessary to carry out a second operation according to some method agreed to between the sender and the receiver. The method used was not indicated in the codebook. All the Manchurian coded messages were divided into groups of 5 figures and started with the group 00011.

(c) The Japanese Diplomatic Code.

The code used by the Japanese Embassy in the messages obtained by KIRFEL differed from that used by the Manchurian Legation in that it was alphabetical and not numerical. The coded messages were divided into five-letter groups and the letters R, F and S appeared to predominate. Vowels were omitted. OKW/Chi failed to break this code, but suggested that, as the Manchurian Legation and Japanese Embassy worked in close cooperation, it was based on the codebook taken from the Manchurian Legation.

(d) Coding Machine in Manchurian Legation.

This machine was described to KIRFEL as having two parallel rollers about 80 cms. in length placed above a keyboard and as being furnished with a handle on one side. It was suggested by OKW/Chi that it was of unusual construction.

(e) Cyphers of other countries.

In a conversation with ADLER, KIRFEL was informed that although CKW/Chi had been unsuccessful in breaking down East Asiatic cyphers, they had been successful in breaking the cyphers of the following countries:- Finland, Portugal, Spain, Poland, Italy and Rumania.

(f) Answers to further questions.

KIRFEL was able to say little regarding cooperation between the Germans and the Japanese on the part of other sections of the RSHA or elsewhere, but stated that he was told by HUETTENHEIM that an agreement had been made between OKW/Chi and the Japanese for an exchange of decoded foreign intercepts - at what date he does not know.

As far as he knew, all cryptographic material which came into the hands of Abt. VI C 4 was passed to OKW/Chi and to no other organisation. The relations between Amt VI and the Pers ZS, headed by VON SELCHOW, were unfriendly and there was no contact.

He thought that all the messages sent out by the Japanese Embassy appeared to be in the same code, although as the code was never broken there was no evidence but that of their general appearance. It was not known to KIRFEL or to OKW/Chi what type or kind of cypher was produced by the Japanese machine.